



THE OFFICE OF FAITHFUL INNOVATION

A Brief Primer for the San Fernando Presbytery

Introduction

Leaders in churches are heroes. The level of grit and grace, adaptability and humility, empathy and endurance that each leader in our presbytery accomplished throughout the pandemic, and previous to the pandemic, is the heartbeat of neighborhoods and communities within the San Fernando Presbytery. Thank you for your ongoing work and joining God in promoting God's reign. You are all too often taken for granted, so we want to take a moment to say that we see you, we appreciate you, and your calling as a leader in the Church transforms lives every day.

We see the struggles you endured as well as the hurdles that are ahead. As Christendom moves further into our rearview mirror, a decreasing ratio of Angelenos naturally identify with Presbyterians. The disappointment we regularly feel in our churches, which is often rooted in lamenting "how it used to be," is heartbreaking. The pews aren't as full, resources are dipping, the various ministries that used to "work" are no longer producing the fruit to which we had grown accustomed, and presbytery membership has decreased seventy five percent since our inception.

Like all of you, we want to turn the corner into a better future and we have an acute sense that faithful innovation will be at the center of that horizon.

In the San Fernando Presbytery's Office of Innovation, we'd be honored to partner with you in your work of joining God for what is next.

Our office will work closely with the office of the associate for congregational discernment. As you know, many churches in our presbytery are participating with the Vital Congregations Initiative (VCI) through our national church. Within the VCI journey, during the first year, our churches do deep discernment with regard to how they may be able to generate new initiatives in the future. In the second year, some of these ideas will be brought to life, adapted, and evaluated. We will join you in any or all of these moments.

While we are just getting started in this office and certainly don't have all the answers, we have been practicing faithful innovation on various levels and in diverse ecclesial settings for over a decade. We plan on pulling out some of those effective habits and rhythms within the churches in our presbytery.



We will help you discern God's activity in your midst, create clarity in planning, clear calls to action, systems of risk assessment, and eventually a culture of faithful innovation to maximize the potential of each church.

We promise to be pastoral, to listen, to widen our imagination, to be graceful in failure, and to sharpen one another as we work toward the three goals of our presbytery.

One thing that we all agree with is that change is not only upon us, but also within us. We already have innumerable stories within each one of our churches that we can learn from. We already have assets that are ready to be put toward God's dream for us. We already have a presbytery with a decade-long tradition of faithful innovation. And most importantly, we already have our Triune God. God the creator, who created us in God's image as creators. The resurrected Jesus, ready to point us toward our next season of resurrections. And the Holy Spirit, laying bread crumbs of hope in front of us as we prepare ourselves to bear fruit together.

God only knows the adventure that is in front of us as a presbytery. However, we do know that each of us have a role to play in this adventure and we'd like to officially invite you into the work of faithful innovation. Whether you've been doing it for decades, or you've never imagined yourself as such, the invite is before us. We hope that you, our heroes, choose to jump in to do the work of change together.

Ultimately we invite you to not only faithfully innovate, but to create a culture of innovation that can drive the change and growth that we all hope to encounter. We see the beginnings of this work happening in three places. Through identifying leaders in our presbytery to do this work within existing churches, through sessions empowering a culture of faithful innovation in their churches, and through making the San Fernando Presbytery a more innovative place to foster faithful innovation. The next three sections will line up how this might happen in the coming years.



Section 1:
Existing Leaders in Our Presbytery



Our presbytery has innumerable people within it who are ready to take on the task of faithful innovation in their current ecclesial contexts. What we have learned is that these people are often not given the platform to create what God has invited them to create.

What if we gave them a community of fellow faithful innovators to generate this type of platform?



The good news is that we already have a community of faithful innovators who participate within a local ecosystem called Cyclical LA. We feel that it may be time to invite others into this space as well for coaching, training, and most importantly, other faithful innovators who can encourage one another into the difficult, yet timely work of faithful innovation.

Which leaders in your sphere would you consider sending into this vibrant community to enact faithful innovation in your church?



We imagine that discerning faithful innovators and current faithful innovators can join the groups that are already happening through Cyclical LA. Historically, these spaces have been for discerning church starters and developing church starters. However, we believe that persons within existing churches can easily join the existing program and community of Cyclical LA.



Section 2:
Sessions Empowering a Culture of Faithful Innovation



It is one thing to create a faithful innovation in an existing church, it is another to create a culture of faithful innovation. Through our connectional tradition, our presbytery has jumped into the PCUSA's national initiative called the Vital Congregations Initiative (VCI). A high ration of our pastors have agreed to meet to work through the material, and this ought to be celebrated.



The celebration, however, cannot finish with simply meeting to discuss what we might become as local churches. The work needs to move through a process of discernment. This is the first year of the VCI. After a period of listening to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, the discernment will need to move into the action of experimentation, and this is where the Office of Innovation in the presbytery can join the process.



The options for joining the mission of God through faithful innovation are endless. Whether by creating a new group, a new program, creating new partnerships, or online initiatives, the key is not only generating one instance of faithful innovation, but to create a generative culture of faithful innovation for a church in their particular context. Our toolbox is filled with tried and tested options for existing churches, and we would be honored if you would allow us to join you for the adventure ahead.

Can you imagine a generative culture of faithful innovation growing out of your church where the good news of Jesus is lived out in your context?



Section 3:
**Making the San Fernando Presbytery a Place to Foster Faithful
Innovation**



Presbyterians are known for being good at many things. For instance, our polity and theology are revered globally. However, we have not been known as the primary place of generativity for discipling faithful innovators. We feel that now is the time to get to work on change management in our middle judicatory toward the work of faithful innovation. The change that we need to manage needs to include updating our systems to function in a way that is fit for life in 2022. How can we see one another more fully? How can we partner better? How can we make decisions more holistically? How can we create a better witness for Jesus on a church family?



This begins with our communication structures. We have a system that is duct taped together from the faithful work of many who led us in the past. If we want to continue honoring the groundwork they laid, then we need to work toward a full update on how we do ministry with one another that will strengthen the presbytery for future generations. What would it look like generate synergy between a robust data management system and website optimization? How can we be in touch with one another that is consistent, clear, and without burden? This is a difficult task as a diverse group of people, but a few small decisions will go a long way in creating this type of space.



There is essential work that we can do together to update our way of being a presbytery and participate in God's movement in the world around us. What is our plan for our current fluid cash? What will we do with properties that no longer have PCUSA churches within them? How might we leverage our existing assets and work together with our church buildings that do still have PCUSA churches within them? Most importantly, how will we tune ourselves to follow the bread crumbs of the Holy Spirit is placing in front of us?



We need to, and we *can*, develop new streams of income. The privileges of Christendom are waning, and with it the need to develop divergent streams of income. From strategic partnerships, to utilizing existing assets, to writing grants, the menu of options in front of us are filled with possibility. How might we create a culture of faithful innovation in the presbytery by generating a flywheel of income streams that can fund our work for years to come?



Conclusion

In the end, this document is simply the tip of the iceberg. These thoughts have already been articulated by many of you over the years. Nothing is new under the sun! Also, it should be noted that we have been on the forefront of faithful innovation as a presbytery for a long time. People look to us from around the country for how to generate new ideas as stories of transformation fill our communities and the communities that we have started across Los Angeles. That said, we have so much more that we can accomplish together. Faithful innovation is about joining God to create tomorrow's church, today. The task may sound overwhelming at first, but with one consistent decision after another, no matter how large or how small, we can continue to move in the trajectory of achieving the three goals that our presbytery has ten on as a community.

As always, please don't hesitate to reach out if you'd like to join in this effort. There will be nothing but welcome in this office for people, of varying gifts, who would like to see our churches grow and thrive like we all know they can. Simply email Nick Warnes at nick@cyclicalLA.com to join in the hard work.

